



SCANLON
FOUNDATION
**RESEARCH
INSTITUTE**

narrative/01
SEPTEMBER 2018



A Changing Australia

How migration is shaping the nation

narrative/01
SEPTEMBER 2018



Table of contents

Introduction	4 – 6
Global	8 – 15
National	17 – 21
Local	23 – 27
Institute discussion of the narrative	28 – 29
Considerations for practical application	30 - 31
Papers, reports, articles and speeches consulted in this paper	32 - 33
About the Scanlon Institute for Applied Social Cohesion Research	34 - 35
List of Institute members	36 - 37

01 |



Introduction

This paper for the Scanlon Institute for Applied Social Cohesion Research draws on recent research and writing from Australian and international universities, think tanks and media to shed light on the great transformation that mass migration is producing in nearly all western societies, along with great anxiety in some.

It is written for all Australians interested in these issues, but above all, for those who work in organisations that promote social cohesion, and who are therefore required to understand, and to explain to others, the impact of these changes on the nation.

When you walk down a street in Australia's largest cities, the odds are that one in seven of the people you pass will have arrived in this country in the past 20 years. In Melbourne, the figure is more like one in four. It's another reminder of how much Australians are still a new people.

Today one in ten of us is born in Asia, and for the first time in the nation's history, a greater proportion of people born overseas are from Asia than from mainland Europe. More than one in three residents of Melbourne's CBD speaks Mandarin or Cantonese at home, while in 67 Sydney suburbs at least half the population does not speak English at home. Migration ***"is unleashing the most profound changes to Australian society since the gold rushes of the 1850s"*** writes journalist George Megalogenis.

In just 70 years, Australia has changed from a mostly white, Anglo-Irish society, with a small Aboriginal population, to a society in which nearly half the population is born overseas or has at least one parent who was. The success of multicultural Australia has been built on levels of public acceptance that have grown stronger over time, especially during the current period of relative economic strength.

While opposition to immigration ran at close to 70 per cent in the depths of the early 1990s recession, over the past decade a majority of Australians have supported high immigration levels in every year, according to an annual poll conducted by the Scanlon Foundation. Along with Canada, Australia accepts more migrants each year, per head of population, than any other OECD nation larger than 10 million people.

But the ground may be shifting. Over 14 years, a Lowy Institute poll has produced a similar result to the Scanlon poll. But in June this year, for the first time a majority of Australians – 54 per cent, a steep climb from 40 per cent in 2017 – say the number of migrants is too high. This year the Commonwealth Government has confirmed that the overall intake will fall by at least 20,000. While the recent reaction against migration has been far more severe in Europe, the unwillingness of any Australian leader to make a sustained case for a large migration program, beyond narrow economic benefits, raises questions about the program's long-term health and future.

This paper is divided into three sections – global, national and local. Each section contains questions for future discussion and research, and the paper concludes with a report on the Institute’s discussion of this narrative, and considerations for future work —————>



Global

Beyond Mediterranean boats and Mexican border walls: the new immigration landscape

Across Europe, immigration has become the defining, dividing issue of the day. Hostility to large-scale immigration has triggered Britain's likely exit from the European Union, the rise of a populist government to power in Italy, and the near defeat of Angela Merkel's government in Germany. In the United States, Donald Trump's administration has promised to drastically cut migrant numbers through large-scale deportations and by building a wall at the border with Mexico.

Yet when flows of migrants and refugees are analysed over the long term, and not only through a western lens, a different picture emerges. [*International Migration: Trends, determinants and policy effects*](#), a 2018 working paper from Oxford University's International Migration Institute, shows that despite the common view, global migration is not rising over the long term.

Between 1950 and 2015 the share of international migrants has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent of the world population. What has fundamentally changed, though, are the patterns of global migration. The big shift is the reshaping of Europe from a continent of colonial powers and emigrant peoples after World War II to a global migration destination today.

In 2015, the arrival in Europe of one million refugees and migrants, mainly from the Middle East and Africa, raised the spectre of the poor of the Earth storming the ramparts of some of the world's wealthiest countries. Yet the Oxford University paper shows that it is not the poor who typically cross borders. Poor people do migrate – the movement of [*an estimated 275 million Chinese rural workers to cities between 1979 and 2015*](#) is the greatest migration in human history – but usually internally.

Absolute poverty discourages emigration: very poor people lack the resources and capability to leave. Instead, most long-distance emigrants come from middle-income countries ([in 2017 the world's largest diaspora populations were from India, Mexico, Russia, China and Bangladesh](#)) and from the relatively better-off sections of the population. Access to money, knowledge, and networks gives people both the means and the motive to migrate. Education, modernisation and the pictures of first world prosperity available with two taps on a computer or smart phone create a global democracy of desire for new kinds of work and lives. Aspirations rise quickly, and when they do, emigration is likely to increase, especially among men. Research from India shows that male members of relatively well-off households are more likely to move abroad for work or study (often to North America, Europe or Australia) while short-distance internal migration is dominated by women from poorer households.

As a country begins to develop, emigration rises, until it drops off when national wealth reaches a certain point. These movements are not set in stone: countries of emigration can reduce them by spending more on education, health and welfare, while countries that spend less lose some of their best talent. Yet the picture is complex. Building a school in a rural area can reduce migration in the short term but increase it in the medium term as education lifts aspiration. In the long term, as national wealth rises, emigration falls.

Turning to destination countries, since 1945 their migration policies have overall become less restrictive than they were in the first half of the 20th century. The great period of liberalisation of migration policies occurred between the 1950s and 1980s. Yet even as wealthy countries moved to introduce tougher border controls from about 1990, liberal policy changes continue to outnumber restrictive ones. For example, the report shows that in 22 liberal democracies, courts have regularly frustrated government attempts to restrict rights to family reunion.

Again, contrary to stereotype, governments of the right are not typically more anti-immigration than those of the left. In fact, the paper cites a study of 21 European and North American countries between 1975 and 2012 showing that right-wing governments were slightly more likely to favour liberal entry policies, while more left-wing governments tended to be more liberal in integration policy: the treatment of migrants after they arrive. Right-wing parties talk tough on immigration, but their words are often not borne out by their deeds. (In Australia, for example, the Howard Government came to office promising to slash immigration and left having created the largest migration program in Australian post war history.)

Nevertheless, the composition of migrant populations has profoundly changed in recent decades. Increasingly, the policies of developed nations privilege the immigration of the skilled and wealthy, including students, while maintaining or raising barriers for lower skilled migrants and asylum seekers. First world governments, with varying degrees of success, are seeking to shape migration to economic needs by recruiting skilled workers. The main aim of policies is not to restrict numbers but to control who comes: migration is not a tap but a filter. And the main filter is no longer race – as it was in Australia and Canada until well after World War II, for example – but class.

Yet there is a significant complicating factor. As populations in developed countries grow older, more prosperous and more concerned with social status, the supply of local workers willing to do arduous manual and menial jobs has decreased – and of course migrants (like those who built the Snowy Mountains Scheme in Australia) have always agreed to do these jobs.

The result is that policies to crack down on illegal migrants and asylum seekers, often announced with fanfare, are often accompanied by policies, announced much more quietly, to attract both higher- and lower-skilled workers. The paper finds that the large gap between politicians' rhetoric and their actions, which often respond to powerful business and trade lobbies who want workers, lend ***“support to the idea that migration policies are often symbolic and are partly or primarily about giving the appearance of control.”***

The white working class: a disaffected new minority? Lessons from London and Ohio

All these changes are causing unrest, especially in mainland Europe and Britain, but also in parts of the United States. In a speech entitled [*Populism and Immigration*](#), British commentator Kenan Malik sets out what he believes is happening beneath the surface.

A set of profound changes since the 1960s, and notably since the collapse of communism from 1989, has progressively dismantled the post war political system built around centrist social democratic and conservative parties. The changes have transformed both sides of politics, but Malik focuses on what has happened on the left.

As viable alternatives to the market disappeared, as trade unions lost power and social democratic parties focused on technocratic management rather than the struggle for a more equal society, the traditional working-class in western societies felt increasingly abandoned, unsupported by its former political representatives, and living in a society in which the old bonds had snapped. Malik says, “Many sections of the working class found themselves politically voiceless at the very time their lives had become more precarious, as jobs have disappeared and public services been savaged, and as inequality has risen.” The second shift on the left was to embrace identity politics based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Malik says that as the language of identity has replaced the language of class and ideology, class itself has come to be seen as a cultural, even racial attribute. Western societies are made up of many non-white – and particularly in Europe, Muslim – people who are disadvantaged. But today they are less likely to be described as working-class. That label has become a white identity.

These changes cannot be attributed to immigration, Malik says. Had not a single immigrant come to western societies, many of their citizens would still feel displaced by the upheavals wrought by feminism, consumerism, the growth of youth culture, the explosion of mass culture, free market economic policies, greater individual freedom, the decline of traditional institutions such as the Church and the atomisation of society. Yet for working-class people, immigration has become the primary symbol of change, social disruption and cultural loss.

Barking-Dagenham and Ohio: two portraits of the white working class

Justin Gest, an associate professor of public policy at George Mason University in the United States, has studied what he calls the “white working-class” in America and Britain. His book, [*The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*](#), is based on interviews with residents of Barking and

Dagenham in East London, and Youngstown in Ohio, and was published in 2016, around the time of the Brexit vote and before the election of Donald Trump.

Allowing for different histories, traditions and points of view, Gest found striking similarities between the working-classes of these two regions.

Both have seen the decimation of the factories and foundries – cars in East London, steel in Youngstown – that once provided their members, especially men, with regular jobs. Both are consumed by a sense of loss, by a desire to recreate the world of 50 years ago, when they felt they had a sense of identity and power (hence the resonance in Youngstown and similar places of Trump's slogan, 'Make America Great Again').

In both places, a sense of political deprivation has fuelled support for right-wing ideas and movements – the British National Party and United Kingdom Independence Party in Britain, the Tea Party and Trump in America. A critical insight in Gest's book is that it is not absolute economic deprivation that most worries the white working class. It is the view that other groups are passing them by. In the United States, "those who are economically, socially, or politically deprived and perceive historically disadvantaged groups as central to society are more likely to support the Tea Party or Donald Trump than those who are deprived but also see historically disadvantaged groups as deprived." In both countries, these feelings are held most strongly by young, white, working-class men.

An immigration proposal for Britain – with an Australian flavour?

Balanced Migration: A Progressive Approach, a 2018 paper from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, recognises the trends above but takes an optimistic view.

It argues that developed nations can both reap the benefits of immigration and soothe the fears of citizens about the change that migration brings. While these fears are “fuelling new forms of authoritarian populism and undermining faith in liberal democracy,” their source lies not in migration itself but in the inability of governments to competently manage it.

Politicians, especially those on the centre-left, have failed to articulate a credible agenda on immigration, the paper finds. They have felt torn between a desire to promote the economic benefits of migration and a fear that it creates less cohesive communities, especially among the poorest and most vulnerable groups.

Politicians also avoid discussing the issue for fear of pandering to prejudice. These reactions are understandable, but their effect is to leave a vacuum at the centre of politics, giving space to the most extreme voices, who claim that political elites are destroying the social fabric by setting immigration policy behind closed doors.

The paper argues that politicians can no longer simply complain about the false promises of populists: they must set out a credible position on immigration that can secure public consent. People understand that their nation needs certain categories of migrant workers, particularly the highly skilled. And they are not indifferent to the plight of refugees. But they want governments to control the flows of people coming in. The paper argues that while “long-term changes to the structure of the global economy and climate mean that rising immigration is likely to be a permanent part of our future,” that fact does not, and should not, render governments powerless to intervene for the national good.

Accordingly, the paper recommends a range of specific policies, including adoption of a points-based system, similar to those in effect in Australia and Canada, to attract highly skilled labour. Low-skilled workers should be accepted based on demand. A system of digital identity verification, such as Estonia’s e-identity card, would

reduce illegal immigration. Family reunion policies should be tightened, with rules requiring spouses and extended family members to show that they can both support themselves financially and integrate by speaking the language of the host country. At the same time, exploitation of both migrant and domestic workers must be tackled. A national strategy for social integration – including a migration impact fund to support communities faced with rapid population change and pressure on public services – would encourage greater social contact and a more inclusive concept of citizenship.

What is striking about the Blair Institute paper, written mostly for a British audience, is how its recommended balance of welcome and control in migration policy resembles Australia's broad approach since it launched its post war migration program just over 70 years ago.

- *How should Australia's national interest intersect with our obligations as a global citizen, and what role does immigration policy play?*
- *How much does the analysis of the white working-class set out above apply to Australia?*
- *Are there parts of the country where these tensions are widely felt?*
- *How should policy makers respond?*

03|



National

Under pressure: is migration making many Australias?

Australia's current immigration debate, unlike that in Europe, has so far focused more on migration's role in exacerbating pressures on housing and infrastructure, and making Australia's spread of population even more uneven, than on challenges that migration might present to social cohesion.

But all these issues are alive in the debate that has emerged in 2018, after 20 years of playing a relatively minor role in national politics.

In 2016, 87 per cent of immigrants lived in major cities, compared to 67 per cent of the Australian-born. Even that figure does not capture the magnetic role of Sydney and Melbourne in attracting migrants. Grattan Institute research shows that in the year to September, 2017, 187,000 overseas migrants moved to NSW and Victoria, predominantly to their capital cities. In absolute terms, this was the highest influx to these cities in their history. The next most desirable destination, Queensland, took just 31,000 migrants.

Migration is creating two, or many, Australias. Journalist George Megalogenis sketches them in a 2017 article for [Australian Foreign Affairs](#). Sydney and Melbourne are on the road to becoming sprawling cities of about eight million people each by 2050. Today 8 per cent of Sydney residents, and only slightly fewer in Melbourne, are born in China or India. That is twice the proportion in Adelaide and Perth, more than twice that in Brisbane, and four times that in Hobart. The truly Eurasian nature of our two biggest cities will not be quickly reproduced anywhere else – except perhaps in Canberra, where the Chinese and Indian-born form 6 per cent of the population; and Darwin, where Filipinos number 4 per cent and all Asian-born 9 per cent.

In Brisbane, the two largest overseas-born groups are New Zealanders (5 per cent) and English (4.2 per cent). Meanwhile, one in every 11 residents of Perth, and one in every 15 in Adelaide, is born in England. Australia's English-born are not homogenous, either. Those in Perth are much more likely to be young, skilled migrants than those in Adelaide and the rest of the country.

Australia's whitest (and oldest) population centres are in regional areas. On the Sunshine Coast, for example, the top four ancestries apart from Australian are English, Irish, Scottish and German. Across regional Australia, the percentage of migrants from Asia is less than 5 per cent; from the Middle East and Africa it is less than 1 per cent. Can a national government still tell a story that holds this vast and increasingly disparate country together?

Is Australia different?

A paradox in Australia – although one common to many OECD countries – is that areas with very few migrants have the strongest anti-immigration views. More than 40 per cent of people in regional Australia, but just over 30 per cent of city dwellers, want migrant numbers reduced, according to the Scanlon Foundation's 2017 [Mapping Social Cohesion report](#). The right-wing populist party, One Nation, is strongest in its Queensland rural heartland, yet gets very few votes within fifty kilometres of the Brisbane city centre.

Does the fact that most immigrants live in cities and that Australia is one of the most urbanised nations on Earth explain our apparent relative ease with immigration? Or is the absence to date of a powerful anti-immigrant movement explained by the stark failure of Pauline Hanson's One Nation to hold itself together?

The 2018 Grattan Institute report, [Crisis of Trust: the rise of protest politics in Australia](#), shows that these questions are complicated. Minority parties with populist leanings are rising in Australia, and hold the balance of power in the Senate. Yet while One Nation is fiercely opposed to immigration, the Nick Xenophon party and the Liberal Democrats are not. The Jacqui Lambie Network has nothing about immigration on its website.

Instead, the report shows that the rise of minority parties over the past decade is linked above all to falling trust in government. More than 70 per cent of Australians think our system of government needs major reform. Many want to 'take back control' in a world where the direction and pace of change isn't to their liking. Yet for unclear reasons, and unlike in Britain and the United States, this desire to regain control is not predominantly linked to immigration.

Still finding their feet: a portrait of two of Australia's largest migrant groups

Australia's healthy economy provides one important reason why support for migration has remained steady. Skilled migrants and overseas students, the backbone of the migration program, have contributed strongly to that economy by finding jobs quickly, filling gaps in the labour market, and paying more in taxes than they take out in welfare benefits.

The main groups among both skilled migrants and overseas students are Chinese and Indians. An unpublished report for the Scanlon Foundation, ***A Sense of Belonging in Australia: Examining Settlement Experiences for Chinese and Indian Migrants***, paints a portrait of Australia's two largest migrant groups after Britons and New Zealanders.

In November 2016, Australia had 570,000 Chinese-born and 450,000 Indian-born migrants – more than a million in total. Yet while the two groups' numbers are roughly similar, their experiences in Australia diverge widely. Chinese migrants are heavily concentrated in the north-west, south-west and centre of Sydney, and in the centre and east of Melbourne. They are most commonly accountants, sales assistants and managers, chefs and software programmers, in that order. But half find it very hard to win their first job, and many feel strongly their lack of social relationships and contacts in Australia. As many as a third do not speak English well or at all. Perhaps as a result, Chinese migrants are more likely to be unemployed than are Indians or the Australian-born. Women are more likely to be unemployed

than men. There is also evidence that many skilled Chinese migrants are struggling to find positions that match their academic qualifications.

The Scanlon research shows that while most feel they belong in Australia, and overall are relatively happy, they scored lower on life satisfaction than did Indian migrants. Among 287 Chinese migrants who took part in Scanlon focus groups in 2015, as many as a quarter of men and nearly 30 per cent of women did not feel they belonged in Australia. Loneliness and lack of belonging is also a challenge for Chinese students. These results led the report's authors to conclude that "Chinese migrants are a relatively insular group with a tendency to find support among members of their own ethnic community. They represent a group that may be particularly at risk of social isolation from the broader Australian community."

Indian migrants, whose numbers have increased exponentially since the mid-1990s, present a very different picture. Their English proficiency is strong, and far more become citizens after arrival than do Chinese migrants. Yet they are much more likely to live in disadvantaged suburbs, especially in Melbourne, than are Chinese or British migrants. Indians are most commonly software programmers, nurses, sales assistants, automobile drivers and child care workers. More men migrate than do women, and those women who come are much more likely than men to have no income and primarily domestic roles in the home, exposing them to the risk of isolation.

Scanlon research suggests that most Indian-born migrants feel they belong in Australia, are satisfied with their life and are relatively happy. Of 217 people interviewed in Scanlon focus groups, only 11 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women had no or only a slight sense of belonging in Australia. Indian migrants who are nearing retirement age or who have experienced discrimination are much less likely to feel they belong here. Nevertheless, compared to Chinese migrants, Indians seem to be more involved in Australian cultural activities, especially sport. Anyone for cricket?

A perceived lack of belonging in these communities may be intensified by the fact that many Chinese and Indian migrants are here on temporary visas. Temporary migration has brought many benefits to both Australia and to migrants, yet in his 2016 book [*Not Quite Australian: How Temporary Migration Is Changing the Nation*](#), journalist Peter Mares identifies a million people who are part of the

workforce but are not permanent residents or citizens. Most may happily leave when their visa expires, but others have effectively made Australia their home, and yet, after years living and working here, have no path to citizenship.

The Scanlon report finds “there is limited large-scale research that addresses the barriers to belonging for Chinese and Indian migrants.” The report is useful for sketching the outlines of Chinese and Indian life in Australia, but while these two groups are highly visible in Sydney and Melbourne above all, their perspectives and stories – what they make of Australia and what Australia will make of them – are yet to be told.

- *What is missing from the immigrant settlement experience today? Are the commonalities and differences compared to previous generations of migrants feeding a weaker sense of social cohesion?*
- *Should Federal and State governments (across jurisdictions) be seeking to actively shape these trends in a more forceful manner? Or does a hands-off approach assist both new and established Australians?*
- *Federal government has absolute control over immigration policy yet lacks strong links from a national perspective to the local. Is this sustainable?*

04|



Local

The battle for Bendigo: a threat to social cohesion in regional Australia

In January, 2014, an application to build a mosque in Bendigo provoked a two-and-a-half year dispute, including ugly scenes at a town council meeting, violence at demonstrations against the mosque, and a High Court appeal, before building could finally begin. The events are analysed in two reports: [*Social Cohesion in Bendigo*](#), written by LaTrobe University researchers for the Victorian Multicultural Commission, and [*Division in Bendigo*](#), by Professor Andrew Markus of Monash University.

Although the conflict emerged from a planning dispute, the ***Social Cohesion in Bendigo*** report defines it as above all “a mass mobilisation of individuals and political groups” against a particular group in society. The protest “aimed to exclude Muslim people from experiencing the same rights and freedoms as others in Australian society to practise their faith.”

Why this dispute happened in Bendigo is unclear. The city is proud of its diversity: it has what are claimed to be the largest Buddhist Stupa in the western world and the longest Chinese dragon in the world. Every Easter, locals of Chinese and non-Chinese background combine to parade the dragon down the main street. The city’s Muslim population numbers around 450 people, from 27 different nationalities. It includes 25 doctors and dentists, about 50 students studying at the local campus of LaTrobe University, and a small group of Afghans settled under Australia’s refugee program. Four mosques have been established without incident in the nearby city of Shepparton. So why Bendigo?

The answer seems to be that a local protest grew and became more aggressive once anti-Islamic groups such as Q-Society and the United Patriots Front, many of whose members came from outside Victoria, got wind of the proposed mosque and came to town. In ***The Australian***, journalist Cameron Stewart wrote with a bold mix of religious metaphors that “outsiders from the radical right helped fund and feed a

small anti-Islamic campaign in Bendigo, fattening it like a Christmas turkey.”

The incident shows vividly how in our media-saturated age, a dispute with symbolic resonance robs the terms ‘global’ and ‘local’ of their traditional meanings. Terrorist killings committed by ISIS in the Middle East clearly alarmed some of the early protestors. News of the dispute quickly travelled overseas: a Q-Society meeting in Bendigo heard from a self-styled “mosque buster” from the UK by video link.

What is less clear is whether the anti-mosque protests were a foretaste of the radical right movements in Britain and the United States described by Justin Gest in *The New Minority*. The *Social Cohesion in Bendigo* report found that many protestors were working class, white, younger and male. Some came from Melbourne, many from outside Victoria. As if channelling Gest’s analysis, the report described the protestors as making “claims to the future, based on dissatisfaction with the present, infused by an idealised and well-ordered past.”

Unfortunately, only one protestor spoke to the LaTrobe University researchers. He or she had contacted administrators of a pro-mosque website to hear their side of the story, then made an unusual personal journey away from fearing and opposing the mosque to feeling increasingly uneasy about “hating these people.” The person spoke of coming to a realisation: “Hang on a minute, that person we call a lefty that we’re meant to hate, is actually just like me.’ Then you start applying that to, ‘Well, why couldn’t I do that with a Muslim person? It really just takes that one thing, to break down the wall in your own mind.”

The reports find that the consequences for the Muslim population of Bendigo have been painful, perhaps “indelible.” The dispute damaged their sense of safety and belonging. Many felt hurt, some moved away. Yet good came of the conflict, too. Other Muslims became leaders, inviting non-Muslims to dialogues, building links with police, helping to develop an Interfaith Council. Some developed a heightened respect for democracy as a result of the mosque finally going ahead.

Many non-Muslim people “felt shame, embarrassment and anger, as well as empathy for the Muslim community.” A Believe in Bendigo campaign emerged to support the mosque; the Bendigo Bank cancelled the account of a virulent anti-mosque group. A Muslim living in Bendigo described two shocks to the LaTrobe researchers: “Firstly, we felt the shock of hate – of people around us hating us and not understanding who we were. Then there was a second shock of love.” This person described Muslims’ connection with the Believe in Bendigo group as “wonderful, like we were

not alone. This group of people had nothing at all to gain, they had a good reputation in the community, they were all established business people and they were supporting us. It was a great feeling.”

The ***Division in Bendigo*** report raises questions for government and the community sector. It argues that the Bendigo Council and staff, and state and federal MPs, did not handle the issue optimally. Acknowledging that the dispute was extremely difficult to manage, the report finds that authorities did not develop an effective communication and consultation strategy. Professor Markus writes: “Local councils and other organisations in regional Australia with historic and currently low levels of cultural diversity have little experience or expertise in the handling of controversial issues within multicultural contexts – and in dealing with ongoing campaigns involving harassment and vilification of staff. Further, the contribution of the state government and its agencies, and local political representatives, did not contribute to calming local tensions.”

“African gangs”: menace or myth?

Last summer, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton and other politicians, along with various media, alleged that parts of Australian cities – Melbourne in particular – were being terrorised by “African gangs.” ***The Australian*** newspaper called it “the summer of hate.”

Former Fairfax journalist Margaret Simons subsequently spent a significant amount of time over three weeks in the western Melbourne suburb of Tarneit, described in the media as an epicentre of the crime wave, to see whether the stories were true. Her story, [*Looking for Trouble*](#), appears in the online newspaper, [*Inside Story*](#).

Tarneit is 25 kilometres west of the centre of Melbourne, right on the fringe. It is part of the City of Wyndham, one of Australia’s fastest-growing local government areas. Thirteen babies are born in the municipality every day, 13,000 people move here every year. Residents of Wyndham come from 162 different countries, and it has the youngest population in Victoria. Fewer than half of residents speak English at home. Indians make up nearly one in four residents, followed by the Australian-born, then British migrants, Filipinos, Chinese, Italians, Irish, Maori, Maltese –

down to Sudanese, the largest African group, but numbering just 2 per cent of the populations, or about 500 people. Simons writes: “It is Australia under construction, and Tarneit is its newest product.”

Tarneit is not especially poor; incomes are about average for Melbourne. Almost all families have two incomes and most people over the age of 15 are employed full time. “These are the shift workers who service the city and look after the ageing.” The new Tarneit Central shopping centre opened late last year; “the Tarneit Railway Station looks like a spaceship landed in the paddocks.” It is the newness of Tarneit – the fact that it offers little for young people to do – that helped to cause the problems.

To enliven the Ecoville housing estate, Simons writes, the developer built a park containing a community centre, skate park, tennis and basketball court. Naturally young people gathered there: it had toilets, water, electricity and free wifi. But once it had sold its houses, the developer abandoned the park. The council refused to fund it. Simons writes that the park had indeed been smashed up by young people, including Africans, but it had already significantly deteriorated before that happened.

The Australian wrote that a gang of youths, “mostly of African appearance... have vandalised the community centre and park, terrorising families with nightly crime sprees.”

As politicians and media spoke of an African gang crisis last summer, people in Tarneit began calling police whenever they saw groups of young Africans. One night, after such a report, police showed up at a basketball court where a bunch of young Sudanese men were playing a game. The police had a chat with the men and left. Simons writes, “The neighbours have rung the police because they are scared. The police have responded because that is their job. The young people have done nothing wrong. Yet all it takes is a few incidents of this kind and the police will be accused of racial prejudice and profiling.” And the young people will feel victimised.

Is there a problem of young African crime? It is true that young Sudanese men are overrepresented in youth crime statistics, but they are also overrepresented among young people in general. No one has done the detailed modelling that would show whether Sudanese are offending at greater rates than other populations of similar age distribution. After going carefully through the data, Simons quotes a police

officer and a Monash researcher who both conclude that the problem is a very small cohort of young people from African backgrounds – perhaps no more than 40 across Melbourne – who are committing serious crime. The police officer, Commander Russell Barrett of the western region, did not think there was a crisis among young Africans.

Simons' article shows how high-quality journalism that blends evidence and statistics with personal observation, and that is written with an open mind, can be a powerful way to illuminate the changing nature of Australia.

- *What are the best ways – academic research, journalism, or other forms of narrative – through which Australians can understand their changing country? What are the strengths and risks of the media's role?*
- *In complex and divergent ways, many citizens feel a loss of voice, power, identity and control. How can community organisations and others working in local areas, create avenues for responding to these anxieties and needs?*
- *How can local governments, NGOs and businesses shape a more coherent message to government and the public about the pressures on their community?*

Institute discussion of the narrative

In June, members of the Scanlon Institute for Applied Social Cohesion Research, representing non-government and government organisations in every state, met to discuss the narrative set out above. A number of themes emerged from the meeting.

Cath Scarth of AMES Australia, which provides English language and other services to migrants, said that Australian governments had not done a good job selling the benefits of migration. Cath and other participants in the discussion thought that governments had largely failed to promote the contribution that migrants made to the economy and to the life of communities.

Part of the problem, participants felt, was that the migration debate had been reduced to the relentless political contest over Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers – a vital issue, but one much smaller than migration as a whole. There was also a concern that public debate was dividing newcomers into “good migrants” who were hard-working, often in professional jobs, and “bad migrants” who were asylum seekers, criminals, “the other.”

Institute members stressed the importance of learning English as a critical element of integration, while believing that Australia had to do more to recognise the value of bilingual speakers in building the economy and society. Much discussion centred on the need to understand the different perspectives organisations and people brought to the migration debate, depending on where in Australia they were located. Jodie Van Deventer of the Committee for Adelaide, and Stuart Tomlinson of the Fremantle Multicultural Centre in Western Australia both pointed out that their states had different experiences and prospects to those of New South Wales and Victoria, with slower population growth and more need for skilled workers to fill job vacancies. South Australia was particularly concerned to put its need for people on the national agenda, Jodie said. The divide between the city and the bush in their respective appeal to migrants was also discussed. With strong local leadership and a welcoming approach, regional centres had much to offer migrants, but the challenge was keeping newcomers there in the long run if jobs were not available.

The meeting also considered how the new Scanlon Institute could be most effective. What kinds of research, analysis or story-telling should it support or promote, and who were its ideal audiences? It was seen as important to try to engage those outside mainstream political debate, including migrants with less widely exposed perspectives. Kiros Hiruy from Swinburne University's Centre for Social Impact thought that research and story-telling should focus on the host community as well as on migrants. Somali Community Champion Abdi Aziz Farah added that it was also important to engage Australians who were hostile, even racist, towards immigrants. The question was, how should that be done?

Despite some concerns about the direction of the immigration debate, participants in the Scanlon discussion expressed hope and cautious optimism that Australia's experience could diverge from that of Europe and the United States, where immigration has become a deeply divisive issue. Australia is still "under construction," said Martin Stewart-Weeks, principal at Public Purpose consultancy, quoting the Margaret Simons article on Tarneit and "African gangs" discussed above. Martin meant, perhaps, that positions are not fixed, that the shape of the country and the attitudes its population holds can still be debated and determined. The challenge for the Institute is how to influence that debate. The following conclusion sets out potential ways that Institute members could influence social cohesion in their area.

Considerations for practical application

Although this first edition of the Institute Briefing deals with research at the global, national and local levels, Institute members highlighted a number of areas arising from the paper that could be used on the ground to benefit social cohesion. Each briefing will provide a set of considerations at the end of the paper that may assist you in bringing research work into an applied setting quickly and effectively.

Share case studies highlighting the benefits of migration

The Institute members emphasised the need to spread the positive messages arising from communities in which to a large degree the arrival of migrants has been of significant benefit to everyone. The [Regional Australia Institute](#) recently produced a range of case studies on rural and regional locations that have taken on migrant communities. These could be used as templates for distribution of great examples of the benefits of migration.

Multilingual at every opportunity

Individuals will learn a new language more quickly if they are able to continue to speak their mother tongue as well as study English. Multilingualism is also a great advantage in business in an increasingly global world. That said, English language proficiency is vital for full participation in society, from conducting casual conversations in a shop or with a service provider, to understanding the occupational health and safety requirements businesses must meet, to simply understanding one's rights and responsibilities as an Australian or temporary resident. Organisations that provide a bridge between maintenance of common languages and the study of English will readily support the understanding and acquisition of English.

Engagement with local government

Local government is a close ally of service providers and not-for-profit organisations as they extend their abilities to directly influence communities. The Institute seeks to encourage greater partnerships with local government, in which insights are

shared and joint projects that build on community strengths and address common challenges are undertaken.

Terminology

Culture, social cohesion, multiculturalism, inclusion and many more terms are complex, and are frequently understood differently across communities. Developing a common understanding of these words is essential to gain the support of the Australian community and to address fears and concerns, without defaulting to immigration as the cause.

Institute members were concerned that the general population often interchanged the term 'migrant' with 'refugee', and/or believed that all migrants came in as permanent residents and citizens. Organisations working in this area need to be consistent in clarifying these misunderstandings, setting out actual migrant numbers, and providing definitions and language that will enable those in the receiving community to understand the facts. Do you have a consistent set of definitions, and clear explanations behind them? Do your employees have this information? How are you sharing it more broadly?

Bridges to resources

Organisations working in social services and migrant transition are invariably short on both financial and personnel resources. Using these resources wisely is essential and a strength of local organisations, according to Institute members.

The ability of service providers to connect clients to services in different layers of government is essential to building both the perception and reality of an inclusive society.

A striking example emerges in the brokered movements of recent migrants to small towns. Community-wide conversations were undertaken prior to movement, local leaders championed the benefits that the migrants would bring, but also understood that structures had to be created to not only attract new migrants to the area but help them to stay.

However, there is a need to think beyond the first generation. One town that had welcomed new migrants through employment in local businesses discovered that their children, when they grew up, found that the town did not cater to their more expansive desires and were moving away.

Papers, reports, articles and speeches consulted in this paper

The Changing Face of Australia, article by George Megalogenis, [Australian Foreign Affairs](#), October 2017

International migration: Trends, determinants and policy effects, working paper by Hein de Haas, Mathias Czaika, Marie-Laurence Flahaux, Edo Mahendra, Katharina Natter, Simona Vezzoli and María Villares-Varela, International Migration Institute Working Paper Series, Oxford University, 2018

China's great migration, article by Jamil Anderlini, Financial Times, May 1, 2015

Migrants Are on the Rise Around the World, and Myths About Them Are Shaping Attitudes, article by Eduardo Porter and Karl Russell, New York Times, June 20, 2018-08-31

Populism and Immigration, speech by Kenan Malik, European School of Politics, Istanbul, September 30, 2017

The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality, book by Justin Gest, Oxford University Press, 2016

Balanced Migration: A Progressive Approach, report by Harvey Redgrave, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, March 2018

Mapping Social Cohesion, report by Andrew Markus, Scanlon Foundation, 2017

Crisis of Trust: The rise of protest politics in Australia, report by Grattan Institute, March 2018

A Sense of Belonging in Australia: Examining Settlement Experiences for Chinese and Indian Migrants, unpublished report for the Scanlon Foundation by Rebecca Wickes, Helen Forbes-Mewett, Andrew Markus, Chloe Keel and Rebecca Powell, January 2018

Not Quite Australian: How temporary migration is changing the nation, book by Peter Mares, Text Publishing, July 2016

Social Cohesion in Bendigo, report by Julie Rudner (lead researcher and author) for the Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2017

Division in Bendigo: Mainstream public opinion and responses to public protest in Bendigo, 2014-2016, report by Andrew Markus for the Greater Bendigo City Council, Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services and Monash University, May 2018

Looking for Trouble, article by Margaret Simons, Inside Story, 18 May, 2018

About the Scanlon Institute for Applied Social Cohesion Research

The Scanlon Institute for Applied Social Cohesion Research exists as a bridge between academic insight and public thought, to support the advancement of Australia as a welcoming, prosperous and cohesive nation.

The body is an initiative of the Scanlon Foundation and furthers its belief that Australia's future prosperity, underpinned by continued population growth, will depend on our ability to maintain, foster and support social cohesion in our communities amidst ever-growing cultural diversity.

The Institute is a virtual organisation that unites Australia's leading thinkers on immigration to produce a bi-annual journal highlighting important lessons from recent findings and exploring how they can be practically applied.

Research on immigration, population and related matters comes from academic institutions, independent think tanks and commentators. This is vital, important work, and it deserves an influential place in the public consciousness.

To ensure that happens, it must be consolidated and interpreted in a way so as to be digestible and practically usable by the people and organisations working directly in communities.

That's what the Institute does. It links thought to action to ensure debate drives the agenda and empowers the critical thinking that will drive our country's interests.



About the Narrator

James Button, a former Walkley Award winning journalist and speechwriter, is Narrator of the Scanlon Institute for Applied Social Cohesion Research. The role of the Narrator is to curate academic reports, commentary and publications that relate to social cohesion, and synthesise the thinking into a narrative that brings their rationale and findings to the fore and encourages consideration.

About the Scanlon Foundation

The Scanlon Foundation was established in 2001 with the endeavour to enhance and foster social cohesion within Australia.

It was formed on a view that Australia, with the exception of Australia's First Peoples, is and always will be a migrant nation.

The Scanlon Foundation aspires to see Australia advance as a welcoming, prosperous and cohesive nation, particularly in relation to the transition of migrants into Australian Society. The Foundation supports ongoing research into the indicators of social cohesion and the results of this research inform the Foundation's activities.

The Foundation makes grants to improve social cohesion in areas of greatest need within Australia.

List of Institute members

Chancellor Professor Peter Shergold AC, Chair

Melbourne

1. **Viv Nguyen** | President, Vietnamese Community in Australia/Vic Chapter Inc
2. **Anna Parle** | Chief Resilience Officer, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion, Department of Premier and Cabinet, State of Victoria
3. **Carmel Guerra** | CEO, Centre of Multicultural Youth
4. **Abdiaziz Farah** | Somali Community Champion
5. **Cath Scarth** | CEO, AMES
6. **Ali Ahmed** | Co-ordinator, Youth Activating Youth
7. **Kiros Hiruy** | Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University
8. **Ms Andrea Pearman** | Australia Post and Inclusive Australia
9. **Anthea Hancocks** | Scanlon Foundation
10. **Sebastian Geers** | Scanlon Foundation

Perth

11. **Dylan Smith** | Executive Officer, Fremantle Foundation, WA
12. **Stuart Tomlinson** | CEO, Fremantle Multicultural Centre, Inc. WA

Brisbane

13. **Mackayla Jeffries** | Director, Community Engagement, Anti-Discrimination Commission, Queensland
14. **Aleem Ali** | National Manager, Welcoming Cities

Adelaide

15. **Jodie Van Deventer** | CEO, Committee for Adelaide

Sydney

16. **Martin Stewart-Weeks** | Principal, Public Purpose and part of The Impact Assembly at PwC, Sydney, Sydney
17. **Rob Schonberger** | Bread and Butter Project, Sydney
18. **Reyna Flynn** | Bread and Butter Project, Sydney
19. **Jackie Ruddock** | The Social Outfit, Sydney

Canberra

20. **Jack Archer** | CEO, Regional Australia Institute, Canberra
21. **Dr Emma Campbell** | CEO, Federation of Ethnic Communities

Contact

info@scanloninstitute.org.au

scanloninstitute.org.au



[@Scanlon_Inst](https://twitter.com/Scanlon_Inst)

An initiative of:



AUSTRALIAN
multicultural
foundation



scanlon
foundation

